

Request for Proposals for Obtaining an AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate

Prevention Resource Center
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Please contact Abby Zent at 406-444-9654 or azent@mt.gov with any questions

Background:

The Prevention Resource Center (PRC), located in the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, assists Montana communities in identifying, developing, implementing, sustaining and evaluating prevention programs. The PRC's partnership with AmeriCorps VISTA is to eradicate poverty and the priority areas of the PRC VISTA Summer Associate program are:

- Reduce school dropout rates and improve school performance by serving
 - in support of Title 1 schools or,
 - education programming in general
- Address hunger issues among children.

The community need in our state:

Education: Contrary to popular opinion, most students, even those considered “at-risk,” make adequate academic progress during the school year. Researchers find that it is actually during the summer months that they tend to fall behind. Research reveals some sobering facts about the effects of being out of school in the summer and academic achievement. It has been observed that, in general, children from lower-income families tend to show a drop of nearly three months of grade level equivalency each year during the summer, compared to just a one-month loss by middle-income students. What is even more disheartening is that these summer losses in achievement can add up year after year and may be the major cause as to why the achievement gap between low- and high-income students continues to grow throughout the elementary school years. Add this all up, and in the elementary grades a summer loss of three months will eventually accumulate to become a gap of 18 months by the end of the 6th grade.

By middle school, summer loss can produce a cumulative lag of two or more years in reading achievement, even when effective instruction during the school year is available. Yet, there is also research that shows that this academic drop can be addressed by providing rich educational experiences for children during the summer. Summer learning programs, encompassing everything from summer camps to library reading clubs to youth organizations to cultural enrichment programs, can play an important role in addressing the loss in academic achievement, particularly for children from low-income families.

Summer programs like reading and outdoor camps provide youth the opportunity to connect with strong role models in their community, develop their leadership ability, and experience firsthand the effect their efforts can have through a community action project. The benefits of these experiences are long term and participants are more likely to stay in school, set and reach goals, and achieve a higher standard of living in the future.

Hunger: Montana communities are experiencing high rates of hunger as measured by the record number of families seeking emergency food. Many Montanans who are eligible to

participate in public programs do not. Many service providers and organizations are in positions to be able to provide information or start-up new programs, but do not know how to get involved. Many Montanans are unaware of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), they may not know how to access it in their communities, or they may think they are not eligible.

With rising food prices as well as the overall cost of living, more and more families cannot make ends meet. Families have to choose between paying for food or for housing, fuel, utilities, healthcare, childcare, and other necessities. Hunger is a symptom of poverty, and by providing people with access to programs that provide access to secure food sources and a place to bring their children when school is out to eat a nutritious meal, the effects of poverty are lessened and money spent on food prior to having program access is freed up for other necessities.

Long-term, hunger creates serious health impacts. Children who are hungry commonly have developmental delays, impaired learning in school, and are absent due to illness more often than children who do not experience hunger. Increasing access to consistent food sources increases children's ability to learn in school and ultimately increases the likelihood of academic success and increases earning potential as an adult.

AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates:

The AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates Program is a federally funded program that places members in community-based agencies full-time for ten weeks, to help implement goals and objectives identified by the community and sponsoring agency. The role of the Summer Associate in the poverty problem-solving process is focused on mobilizing human and other resources to increase the capacity of low-income communities.

The goals of the PRC VISTA Project are:

Goal 1 (Community Building/Performance Measure): To address poverty related needs by strengthening community and the development of infrastructure through a community building process. The process will engage individual citizens, citizen groups, and agencies to address community needs. The process will enable the community to develop and implement a strategic plan resulting in sustainable activities resulting in the meeting of community needs.

Goal 2 (Prevention): To develop opportunities for youth by increasing protective and resiliency factors and decreasing risk factors so that there is overall decrease in youth risk behaviors, particularly substance abuse/use, violence & crime, teen pregnancy, and school dropout rates.

The Summer Associate program enhances an existing VISTA project by providing individuals that will participate for 10 weeks in an intensive level of summer service. During service, Summer Associates are available to the community on a full-time basis which is described by Congress as *"24 hours a day, 7 days a week."* This means that a Summer Associate should be available as deemed necessary by the sponsoring agency, for the project, without regard to standard working hours. VISTA Summer Associates may provide indirect and direct service.

Who Can Apply:

The Prevention Resource Center is looking for community agencies in Montana, either non-profit, school, or government, to sponsor one or more AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate(s)

for 10 week from early June to mid-August 2015. Specific service dates are yet to be determined. In order to qualify for a VISTA Summer Associate, communities should:

- Address the community need in local data terms;
- Have an active prevention coalition that is committed to carrying on the work of the VISTA Summer Associate,
- Identify a sponsoring agency for the VISTA Summer Associate within the community, and,
- Provide direction, guidance and adequate supervision to the VISTA Summer Associate placed.

Cost Share Agreement:

The Corporation for National & Community Service requires the Prevention Resource Center to pay a cost-share portion of the VISTA Summer Associate's subsistence and stipend expenses through a community cost-share mechanism by the way of a signed Memorandum of Understanding. Costs for sites will be according to the following scale:

10 weeks \$1250 per Summer Associate*

*This non-refundable cost may vary from year to year based upon the cost of living increase provided to the VISTAs from the Corporation for National & Community Service. Payment is due 30 days following the VISTA Summer Associate's start date. The PRC and the federal government administer the VISTA Summer Associate living stipend. Should a VISTA Summer Associate begin with your site and prematurely end their service commitment, the position cannot be replaced for any reason once the service year has begun.

Tips for Completing the PRC VISTA Site Application:

1. Read the entire application packet before you begin. If you have questions or need technical assistance contact the Prevention Resource Center at (406) 444-9654. We are happy to review draft proposals and provide feedback.
2. As you complete the application, it is only necessary to say something once. Use clear and concise language, and be sure to answer each section as best you can.
3. Keep in mind that VISTA Summer Associates are community capacity/infrastructure builders, and **cannot** supplant staff roles, duties and responsibilities.
4. An ambitious work plan demonstrating a desire to engage the community to solve social problems and move people permanently out of poverty can always be scaled back.
5. The deadline for submission is the **real** deadline! If sending the site application electronically is not feasible, please submit a hard copy.

Additional Information:

1. All applications are reviewed by the Prevention Resource Center and/or the Corporation for National & Community Service to ensure projects are in alignment of the goals of

CNCS and the PRC, and the work is VISTA appropriate.

2. Applications will not be reviewed until all required elements are submitted.
3. Submitting an application does not guarantee approval as a VISTA Summer Associate site.
4. Receiving approval as a VISTA Summer Associate site does not guarantee VISTA Summer Associate placement. VISTA Summer Associate placements are subject to the availability of federal funds and approval by CNCS.